

Membership Year 2020  
Volume 46, Number 4  
December 2020

# La Pintura

The Official Newsletter of the American Rock Art Research Association  
Member of the International Federation of Rock Art Organizations  
<https://arara.wildapricot.org>

## Color Us Skeptical

By Amy Gilreath and Ken Hedges

IF YOU scrolled headline news on the internet the weekend after Thanksgiving, you likely clicked on some version of a sensational article about extraordinary new discoveries of ice-age pictographs in Colombia, South America. (Simply Google “spectacular eight-mile frieze” or “Sistine Chapel of the ancients” and you’ll have your pick of 100+ web sources where you can read more.) In the following days in early December, like us, you might have been pinged by friends asking, “what do you make of this?” A fair question; after all, you are “that” friend who is most knowledgeable about rock art.

If you had previously read ARARA’s March 2020 issue of *La Pintura* (45[1]:5–9), specifically Jeff LaFave’s article, “2020 Rock Art Travels in Colombia,” some part of this “new” news rang familiar. (Back issues of *La Pintura* are available to the public on ARARA’s website.) After re-reading LaFave’s article, our reply to inquiring friends went something like, “Early last year I read about this rock art concentration and saw photographs of some of these spectacular panels, but I hadn’t heard about it being this old nor about how some of the images are interpreted as extinct megafauna.” As described by LaFave, he and several other ARARA members visited the area in January 2020. These panels are in the Serranía La Lindosa mountains, over 100 km north of the massive Chiribiquete National Park, in central Colombia. This is an area increasingly famous for its biodiversity, beauty, and these large-format, mural-like pictograph panels (Figures 1 and 2). Since 2016, with the calming of civil and military unrest, some of the area has been cautiously opening to research, though much remains off-limits (to minimize impacts on indigenous occupants; because it lacks needed infrastructure for travel, let alone tourism; political unrest, etc.). At the end of his piece, LaFave thanks a group of Colombian rock art researchers at Grupo de Investigación de Arte Rupestre (GIPRI), specifically naming Judith Trujillo, Guillermo Muñoz, and



Figure 1. A portion of the largest shelter at Nuevo Tolima, Colombia.  
Photograph by Jeff LaFave in LaFave 2020:8.

Carlos Martínez among them, for sharing their knowledge about the area’s rock art.

The internet now has untold iterations of the “new Colombian rock art discoveries.” They invariably tout that “Tens of thousands of ice age paintings across a cliff face shed light on people and animals from 12,500 years ago” (*The Guardian*, Alberge 2020) and that the rock art “shows how the earliest human inhabitants of the area would have coexisted with Ice Age megafauna, with pictures showing what appear to be giant sloths, mastodons, camelids, horses and three-toed ungulates with trunks” (CNN, Guy 2020).

Our crawl on the internet combined with sources frequently mentioned in the e-media press articles shows that the story was first announced on *The Guardian* website the morning of November 29, 2020, followed by similar accounts a few hours later on *The Daily Mail* website, and the next day on the website of *The Guardian*’s sister paper, *The Observer*. It was only after the initial announcements in the online tabloids that the University of Exeter issued its official press release on November 30, which repeated

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## President's Message

### GREETINGS ARARA Membership!

OUR ARARA 2020 year has presented us with new adaptations, lifestyle adjustments, and changing technologies. We have found time to complete field projects, finish the research projects one started, and create new ones, yet we continue to stay connected and focused during this pandemic. We are all experiencing the expanding technology platforms that have offered us an avenue to keep us connected, especially through Zoom, Facebook, and the good old telephone. We plan to continue to utilize these technologies to our benefit, especially with online presentations. ARARA has some interesting and exciting events on the horizon that you will want to be involved in!

I encourage all to participate in our events; we want to hear what research work you have been doing. We have added to our online events one thing in particular: a Happy Hour prior to the event. Come join us and socialize!

Also, please submit your information to our new editor Linda Hylkema to be included in the *La Pintura*. The other platforms to connect with ARARA are Facebook, our webpage, and YouTube. And of course, your Board Members..

The Conference Committee continues to move forward with planning the ARARA conference for 2021. They will keep the membership posted on our plans to virtually meet. Watch for emails and check the ARARA website for future details. They are working to keep us connected. Thank you to the Conference Committee for your continued work and diligence.

The Nominating Committee has been busy this year in selecting a slate of candidates for Directors positions. Next year the ARARA membership will have the opportunity to cast their vote online to select new Board members. Thank you to the Nominating Committee for volunteering their time, as they continue to oversee the process of the nomination of our Board.

ARARA's Standing and Ad hoc Committees are integral to this organization. Each contributes to the operations and is composed of volunteers. I welcome you to join the efforts in supporting ARARA as chair or co-chair on one of these committees. Thank you to all the Standing and Ad

hoc Committees for the giving of your time. Contact one of the Board members to inquire about open positions and check on our website.

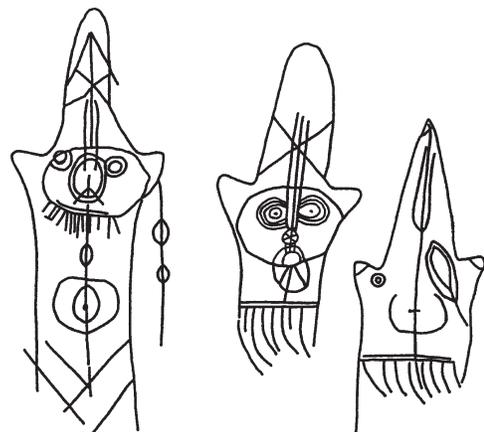
The ARARA Board has continued to meet on a monthly basis, via Zoom. We find that this platform offers us a much better, more interactive face-to-face opportunity rather than conducting our meetings via teleconference. I believe we prefer Zoom-ing, as we can work through our meetings with the sense of being in the same room. The Board is composed of individuals who reside in locations across the United States in different time zones, so actually this has been a significant benefit as it has eliminated both travel time and expenses.

The year 2020 has come to a close, and we all have experienced this pandemic in various ways. It has changed us, but I am proud of our team in that we have found ways to stay connected. We have adapted well and will continue to carry ARARA's mission forward into a New Year—2021.

Remember to renew your membership and encourage others to join ARARA!

I wish the ARARA membership a healthy and prosperous New Year; remain safe in body and mind. ❁

Respectfully,  
—Ann Brierty, President



## Reminder: New for 2021!

*La Pintura* is transitioning to digital-only delivery starting in 2021. This will start with Vol. 47, No. 1. This will save ARARA several thousand dollars every year in postage and allow us to increase access to our content and messaging. ❁



## Monthly Lecture Series



February 13, 2021

### *The Rock Art of the Serranía la Lindosa, Colombia: Amazing Sites and Viral Hyperbole*

by Jeff LaFave

COLOMBIA IS a beautiful country that is very rich in terms of rock art. It has thousands of sites in many regions, including the Altiplano. Recently, rock art in the Serranía La Lindosa has received considerable attention because of unique painted sites like Cerro Azul. The Serranía La Lindosa is located in the southeast portion of Colombia, in the jungle region on the edge of Amazonia. The sites are extensive, beautiful, and visually overwhelming. The rock art has been known for decades and has been studied by Colombians for years. This presentation provides an overview of some of the primary sites in the Serranía La Lindosa based on a visit in January of 2020. It will also compare those sites with some in the Altiplano. Recent news accounts about rock art in the Serranía La Lindosa have gone viral worldwide, unfortunately including many claims that are hyperbolic and without basis. ❄️

**Location: Zoom - Computer, tablet, or smartphone**

**Register here: <https://arara.wildapricot.org/event-4140909>**



Stay Tuned for our March Lecture:

### *Egypt: Pyramids of the Nile and Rock Art of the Western Desert*

by Mavis Greer

For more information: <https://arara.wildapricot.org/Lectures>

Previous ARARA online lectures can be viewed on our YouTube channel (link at <https://arara.wildapricot.org/Lectures>)

## Fire and Damage to Rock Art

by Linda Hylkema

THIS LAST year has been unprecedented for the West Coast in terms of the seemingly relentless and massive wildfires taking their toll across millions of acres of public and private lands. These fires wreak havoc on our lives and the environment in innumerable and devastating ways. California, in particular, has seen such hot fires that, in some areas, little is left but moonscape. What happens to wildlife, archaeology...rock art?

Rock art, as well as other sensitive cultural sites, may be much more visible when the vegetation covering them is burned (potentially making them more susceptible to looting/damage). Rocks or caves with rock art can be damaged, spalled, or cracked. Excess heat can also cause chemical alterations to stone, increase weathering, cause changes in organic paints, and damage to rock varnish which may destroy its potential to date the art. Cave panels can collapse. Heavy equipment used to create firebreaks can inadvertently dislodge cultural materials.

I have heard anecdotally of at least two areas where cultural resources have been affected; undoubtedly, there are more. The Bear Fire in Butte County, California, has damaged some cupule sites. The Bobcat Fire in southern California has consumed Bear Canyon, known to have pictograph caves in it. Whether or not they survived, it is too early to tell.

This can leave us, who care so much about these priceless resources, feeling helpless and dismayed. Land managing agencies have their hands full trying to assess the damage across their units, and cultural resources may take a necessary backseat to road clearance, tree and hazard removal, power restoration, and other safety measures. But there are several things we can do:

- Contact the cultural resources manager or director of a land-based agency to see if they may need help with post-burn assessment surveys. Keep in mind, though, that they may be overwhelmed at this point and may not yet be ready for your help. But they will appreciate your outreach.

- Find out if there are any site stewardship programs in your region; they may need help assessing which sites are damaged and/or that need protection from renewed interest in looting. Many of these programs are done under cooperative agreement with land managing agencies, so this is highly related to the first point, above.

- If you live in a region with many sensitive sites, keep an eye out for looting (needless to say, do this regardless of fire). Report anything suspicious to the landowner. Just keep your eyes and ears open and don't be afraid to speak up.

- Realize that many folks will suffer emotional distress from damage or loss of special or sacred sites that are important to them, to their families, and to their culture. Others may feel that it is part of the natural process. Whatever the sentiments may be, they are valid and need acknowledgement. Simply validating their response may be the most important thing you can do at the moment. We are all in this together.

Do not ever go into any closed off areas; obey all signs, and enter burned lands only after they have been opened by the owner and/or land-managing agency or you have specific permission to be in there.

As I was looking for fire-related material for this article, I came across an outstanding 2007 publication by the U.S. Forest Service entitled, *Wildland Fire in Ecosystems: Effects of Fire on Cultural Resources and Archaeology*. They not only provide an outline of fire behavior and how it moves, but they devote a whole chapter to describe the effects of fire and fire management on petroglyphs and pictographs and the significance of these resources in understanding the history and culture of a region. The final chapter presents a framework for integrating cultural resource and wildland fire management, provides practical applications for situations mentioned throughout the text, and clearly defines management roles in fire situations. It also elaborates on the process of identification, evaluation (documentation), and mitigation in both planned (prescribed) and unplanned (wildland) fire situations. You may access the document here: [https://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs\\_gtr042\\_3.pdf](https://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr042_3.pdf). (A word of caution though, don't print it out unless you have a ream of paper in your printer; this thing is 236 pages long!)

Another publication worth reading is *Bare Bones Guide to Fire Effects on Cultural Resources for Cultural Resource Specialists* by Kate Winthrop of the Bureau of Land Management. She offers the suggestion, among other things, to cover rock art with fire retardant fabric (not foam or other chemicals) if possible: [https://www.nps.gov/archeology/npsGuide/fire/docs/8%20Bare%20Bones%20Guide%20to%20Fire%20Effects%20on%20CR-BLM\(Winthrop\).pdf](https://www.nps.gov/archeology/npsGuide/fire/docs/8%20Bare%20Bones%20Guide%20to%20Fire%20Effects%20on%20CR-BLM(Winthrop).pdf).

Sometimes bad things happen even under the best of stewardship intentions: trying to do the right thing can have an unintended effect. Australia's Balloon Cave cannot be restored after fire damage caused by a recycled plastic walkway ignited into a fireball in 2018 (<https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/aboriginal-rock-art-0013113>). This just illustrates the point that managing and protecting our priceless cultural resources is a multifaceted, ever-adapting process. ❄️

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and expanded on the claims seen in the popular press. That release states, “The research was carried out by Gaspar Morcote-Ríos, from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Francisco Javier Aceituno, from the Universidad de Antioquia, José Iriarte and Mark Robinson from the University of Exeter and Jeison L. Chaparro-Cárdenas from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia” and that “the discovery was made by researchers on the ERC project LAST JOURNEY... It features in a new Channel 4 series, *Jungle Mystery: Lost Kingdoms of the Amazon*.” Finally, almost like an afterthought, it states, “The findings are also outlined in an article in the journal *Quaternary International*.” Of all the online accounts we have examined, only CNN included this statement, but the average reader who pursues it will find that article by Morcote-Ríos et al. (2020) behind a paywall that offers a copy for \$35.95.

The website for ERC—LAST JOURNEY describes it as “an ERC-funded interdisciplinary project that explores Late Pleistocene/Early Holocene human adaptations and impacts across the diverse landscapes of northwest South America.” ERC is the European Research Council, which has an impressive international grants program. The introductory paragraph for the project (ERC 2020) presents the central thesis for this grant-funded research project: “South America was the final continental migratory challenge of humans on their global expansion. This migration took place amidst one of the most significant climatic, environmental, and subsistence regime shifts in human history—the Late Pleistocene/Early Holocene transition—which contributed to the extinction of megafauna..., plant domestication, and today’s remarkable diversity of indigenous South American groups.”

The ERC had issued a one-line blog post on June 8, 2020, announcing the publication of the Serranía La Lindosa paper 10 days earlier, but the news remained under the radar until the media blitz launched by *The Guardian* in November to promote this BBC documentary hosted in the field by an “explorer-archaeologist.”

There are at least three take-away points from the foregoing: 1. the press release and adaptations of it are part of a promotional/public relations media campaign to popularize a TV program; 2. the mission of the research project telegraphs its findings; and 3. skepticism for flashy headlines is healthy.

Two particularly titillating aspects of the many related articles are the date-frame hung on the beautiful panels, and the interpretation of some of the designs as ice-age megafauna. Each deserves a bit of separate consideration since journalistic re-writes and journalists’ interpretations of archaeological data combined with the 21st-century need-

for-speed journalism have escalated claims beyond reported facts. As one example, a subsequent post now claims that “The series of vivid drawings were created approximately 12,600 to 11,800 years ago and *deliver solid evidence* that the Amazon rainforest’s first inhabitants resided beside Ice Age mega-mammals such as the giant sloths, camelids, horses, mastodons, and three-toed ungulates sporting long trunks” (Spry 2020 [emphasis added]).

### *The Date-Frame?*

We look first at the chrono-stratigraphic data reported by Morcote-Ríos et al. in their 2020 *Quaternary International* article. AMS radiocarbon dates were obtained from subsurface deposits in three rockshelters test excavated in 2017–2018: 11 dates from Cerro Azul (where a block exposure or trench was excavated), and one each from Cerro Montoya and Limoncillos (each tested with a 1x1 m unit). Of the suite of 13 radiocarbon dates, the two oldest from Cerro Azul, both on charcoal, were rejected, leaving 11 dates, each on an individual seed: nine dates in fair stratigraphic sequence at Cerro Azul, and one from the basal cultural deposit at each of the other two shelters. As stated in the abstract, “Contemporary dates at the three separate shelters establish initial colonisation of the region between ~12,600 and ~11,800 cal BP.” That claim alone is a wonderful finding worthy of continued research funding, in our humble opinion. The dirt-archaeology data appear to support intermittent occupation of rockshelters in the region since about 12.6k cal BP. This isn’t unreasonable or particularly shocking; it is in line with a growing body of archaeological findings of early occupations in North and South America, as the authors make clear in numerous citations and in their Figure 2, mapping the location of generally comparably early-dating archaeological sites elsewhere in Colombia. Morcote-Ríos et al. do not report nor do they even imply that they have a direct date on the rock art, sidestepping an issue that Mark Robinson tackles head-on in the TV documentary: “The one that most people know is carbon dating, but the biggest problem in this, there’s no carbon involved. We’re looking at ochre on those walls. There’s a real problem for us.”

The basal date for occupational use of Cerro Azul, 12.2–11.8k cal BP, is from about 105 cm below the surface; pottery is found throughout the upper 30 cm or so of the deposit (per their profile drawing) and in association with a radiocarbon date of about 2.9–2.8k cal BP (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:6). The only date from Cerro Montoya, 12.4–12.0k cal BP, is the basal date for the rockshelter from 110 cm below surface, with pottery recovered to a depth of about

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Figure 2. A portion of one of the panels at Cerro Azul, Colombia. Photograph by Jeff Lafave in LaFave 2020:9.

75 cm. The only date from Limoncillos, 12.6–12.4k cal BP, is the basal date for the rockshelter from 136 cm below surface, with pottery recovered to a depth of about 55 cm. Perhaps this is more detail than needed in support of the simple point that each of the three shelters has a substantial ceramic-period deposit. Yet, the temporal relationship between the rock art and the ceramic-period deposits, as well as contemporary indigenous populations' relationship to the rock art, receive little consideration in the publication or documentary. Cast in a different light, the headlines could read: "Stunning Pictographs Found Associated with Ceramic-Period Rockshelters in Colombia."

The follow-on interpretation that the rock art is synchronous with the basal dates because a handful of the images are interpreted as Terminal Pleistocene/Early Holocene megafauna species now extinct is, for us, too far of a reach.

We keep a healthy amount of skepticism that this body of pictographs is as old as has been claimed, noting first, and most obviously, that many of the pictographic panels remain vivid even though they are in open-air

settings in a tropical rainforest jungle (they are, albeit, somewhat protected in the slight overhanging bedrock cliff exposures). In light of these two simple characteristics (bright colors, and their wet, open-air setting), why aren't they interpreted as a few thousand or even just a few hundred years old?

### ***Brand New Discoveries?***

Suggestions that the stunning murals are a brand-new, never-before revealed discovery also is misleading. Excavations were conducted in the main Cerro Azul rockshelter and in two smaller shelters with only "highly eroded paintings" and "remnants of red pigment," while three newly discovered panels were discovered in shelters that were not excavated. The report provides no details on which paintings are in which shelters but everything is conflated with the spectacular panels in Cerro Azul featured so prominently in both the publicity and the documentary. To spin the story as if no one has given attention to Serranía La Lindosa rock art until the LAST JOURNEY

team discovered them is wrong. Since Morcote-Ríos et al.'s publication contains numerous citations of previous work in the area, we will attribute much of this spin to e-media, and cut the researchers slack. Once a story "gets legs," it's hard to correct misrepresentations.

In the interest, though, of correcting some of those misrepresentations, stunning, large, mural-like pictograph panels in the area were first reported in the 1950s, and they have since been studied by various Colombian rock art scholars when political conditions in Colombia made it possible to do so safely. The earliest report is by Alain Gheerbrant (1952), and a fairly recent article by Urbina and Peña (2016) (which they dedicate to Gheerbrant) on the rock art of the Serranía La Lindosa, with the translated title of "War Dogs, Horses, Cattle and Other Themes in the Rock Art of the Serranía de la Lindosa," are not obscure references—Urbina and Peña (2016) mention earlier records in 1857 by General Augustin Codazzi as the earliest written account. As important, these foundational publications provide alternative and equally valid interpretations (arguably more-valid interpretations) of this body of rock art. As the title to Urbina and Peña's article indicates, Urbina interprets the images as indigenous Amazonians' confrontation and encounters with Spanish aggressors. Urbina and Peña, both retired professors at the National University of Colombia, provide a number of panel photos in support of their interpretation. In fact, some of their panel photos pair up with photos credited to Jose Iriarte in recent *Artnet News* posts by Boucher (2020a and b) that push the hype. Also, the Urbina and Peña article indicates that Urbina's interpretations are informed, at least to some degree, by relevant indigenous people. The failure to incorporate other available information and perspectives is particularly unpleasant to GIPRI, some of whom suggest that the mass-media roll-out of this research smacks of old-fashioned colonialism.

In an on-line post responding to the multitude of related splashy year-end announcements, Trujillo, a member of GIPRI, which has been working in the Serranía de La Lindosa toward systematic documentation of the sites also since 2017, points out several misrepresentations in mass media coverage relating to the promotion of the Channel 4 program: There are a number of known and no doubt undiscovered murals, but even if strung end-to-end they wouldn't stretch eight miles. There is neither an absolute or relative chronology for the pictographs. Similarly which ethnic group(s) made the rock art is not known; thus, their original meanings remain unknown. "[S]ome researchers see representations of megafauna (Morcote, Aceituno, Iriarte 2019, 2020), or of war dogs brought in during the

Spanish Conquest (Urbina 2018), or of llamas from the gold trade with Peru (Gheerbrant 1948)."

### ***Images of Ice-Age Megafauna?***

We initially wondered to what degree mass media rather than Morcote-Ríos et al. were interpreting some of the pictographic images as ice-age megafauna. Perhaps, for example, that was only one of several hypotheses that the authors mention, and that, unfortunately, it was the one that captured the imagination of overly ambitious journalists and bloggers moving fast. We allowed, also, for the possibility that the ice-age ascription is the supposition of just one or a few members of the large ERC-project research team. Alas, the Exeter University's formal press release indicates otherwise: "The thousands of pictures are among the oldest depictions of people interacting with the huge creatures, including mastodons." The research paper itself answers our questions: "Preliminary observations of the rock paintings indicate that these early settlers may have drawn a variety of now extinct megafauna with *impressive realism*" (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:1-2, emphasis added) and "Importantly, the rock art depicts what appears to be extinct Ice Age megafauna. Although megafauna images have been suggested for other rock art contexts in Central Brazil...and regions of South America..., to our knowledge, the ones from La Lindosa appear to be the more realistic ones. They include images that appear to resemble giant sloth, mastodon, camelids, horses, and three-toe ungulates with trunks..." (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:11). And finally, "The extensive rock art not only hints at the coeval presence of humans and megafauna in the landscape, but also that megaherbivores were a component of the hunters' diet, an interaction confirmed in contexts from the Bogota Plateau" (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:13).

To be clear, there is no argument about well-documented associations of early humans and extinct megafauna in other parts of South America, but it is hard to see how those associations confirm the presence of megafauna in the Lindosa diet in the absence of any remains of extinct animals in the sites. In fact, the archaeofaunal profile that Morcote-Ríos et al. present in their figures 10 and 11, which is for Cerro Azul only, indicates that the inhabitants processed primarily fish (which is  $\geq 50\%$  of the identified bone fragments from each 5-cm level), small mammals (about 30% at all depths but for the basal 10 cm), and much smaller amounts of reptiles and bivalves: "The high degree of fragmentation of the bony remains, the presence of small animals and the absence of medium-sized and large mammals...and birds, suggest that Cerro Azul was a site for

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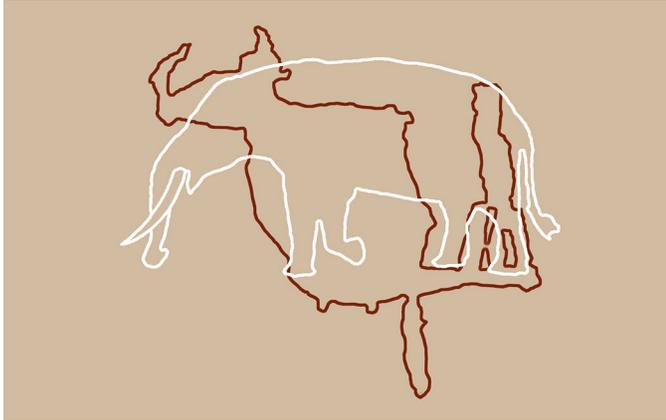


Figure 3. An exemplar “mastodon”? Trace-drawing of the pictograph in red; outline of an actual *Notiomastodon* in white.

processing small animals, and if the ancient occupants did hunt larger animals, these were processed at a different site” (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:9-10).

With the presence of megafauna defined solely on the images of a few selected animals among thousands of elements on the rock surfaces, it is useful to take a closer look at two of the six examples they profile (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:Figure 13a–f). Among the animals, the “mastodon” is given a star turn in the television documentary, in which project archaeologist Mark Robinson says, “When you look at this right here, looks like an animal, with the animal’s head here, a large body, the shape of the head as well is quite distinctive, and then particularly distinctive is this long trunk coming up the front,” upon which the explorer-archaeologist exclaims, “This is a mastodon, a prehistoric relative of today’s elephant. But mastodons haven’t roamed South America for at least 12,000 years; the people who once lived here must have lived alongside them.” Mark agrees: “Here we have an overlap between people and these megaherbivores—it tells us that this artwork was drawn at that time period.” In the formal paper, the authors tell us that the drawing, “exhibiting a trunk and the characteristic protuberance in the back of the head, reminds us of a mastodon” (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:11; Figure 13c). The animal here would more accurately be *Notiomastodon* (a distant relative of the mastodons that lived in North but not South America). Never mind that the “characteristic protuberance on the back of the head” is found on the mammoth (which never roamed South America), not on the South American *Notiomastodon*. Never mind that the “mastodon” does not have a complete body, a tail, or legs. And never mind that their pictograph of a “mastodon” has no massive tusks, one of the most characteristic features of the species and one that is emphasized on prehistoric pictures of elephants the world over. We’ll let you be the

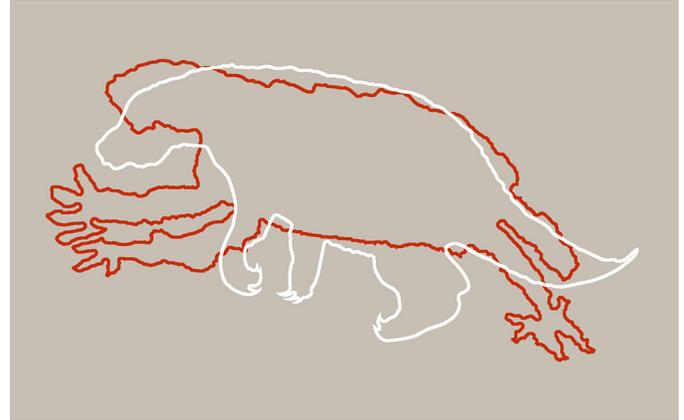


Figure 4. An exemplar “giant sloth”? Trace-drawing of the pictograph in red; outline of an actual giant sloth in white.

judge with Figure 3, comparing the outline of their exemplar “mastodon” drawn with “impressive realism” (their term, not ours) with the outline of an actual *Notiomastodon* reconstruction.

Then there’s the one for which “The overall shape, as well as the large head, thorax and prominent claws, allow us to consider that the animal depicted...could be a giant sloth” (Morcote-Ríos et al. 2020:11). Like the mastodon, the “impressively realistic” painting of this giant sloth lacks a defining characteristic: the massive tail. Again, we invite you to compare the outline of the pictographic “sloth” with the real thing (Figure 4).

The examples of purported megafauna illustrate another characteristic of the Morcote-Ríos et al. report: selective choice of details to justify the interpretations. A “three-toed ungulate with trunk” is thought to be a rare camelid, but the animal has three toes on two legs, two toes on another, and no toes on the fourth. A real-life giant sloth had three obvious giant claws; this pictograph creature has three toes on one front limb, four on the other, and five on one back limb (the fourth limb is truncated by an adjacent geometric motif). We’ll let you decide whether these actually look like claws.

In short, these are not photo-realistic paintings with “impressive realism.”

## Summary

The tendency for e-media to grab hold of the shiny rather than more-measured statements is as unfortunate as it is entertaining. It is unrealistic, though, to expect mass media to focus on this statement by Morcote-Ríos et al. (2020:13): “In summary, these preliminary data are key for future research, such as the origin of first colonisers, the potential existence of megafauna in the

region, the settlement pattern and seasonal mobility, the ritual practices, the relation between the sites to the rock paintings; the territory size, the forest management practices, the food procurement strategies and the short and long-distance relationships, for example with Serranía Chiribiquete or other riverine forager groups”—especially if a press release points journalists to the shiny.

To paraphrase the old Hill Street Blues tag line, Stay Skeptical Out There. Consider the source, consider the motive(s) behind scintillating news, and let's allow ourselves some time to reflect on the “news” before we endorse or denounce new findings—especially if they roll-out on a slow-news holiday week-end and serve, in part, to promote a new TV show.

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## La Pintura Information/Submissions

*La Pintura* is the quarterly newsletter published by the American Rock Art Research Association. Subscription to this publication is a benefit of membership in ARARA. Members may choose to have the newsletter delivered to an email address, or via regular mail to a physical address or P.O. box. Back issues of *La Pintura* are available electronically on the ARARA website, [arara.wildapricot.org](http://arara.wildapricot.org). The current issue of the newsletter is posted to the website approximately four weeks after distribution to members.

ARARA members love to read about your new rock art discovery, recording project, or new idea for interpretation. For that to happen, *La Pintura* needs you to submit articles on current research or fieldwork. Doing so will make *La Pintura* a better journal.

Editorial deadlines insure timely publication of each issue. Deadlines for submissions are:

- February 15 (March)
- May 1 (Conference Issue)
- August 15 (September)
- November 15 (December)

*La Pintura* is edited by Linda Hylkema. The editor extends an open invitation to members to submit articles, news, letters to the editor, book reviews, and other items of interest to ARARA members.

All submitted material should be sent to Linda Hylkema, [araraeditor@rockart.us](mailto:araraeditor@rockart.us). If necessary, postal mail for the *La Pintura* Editor may be sent to Linda Hylkema, 317 N. Bayview Avenue, Sunnyvale, CA 94085

**Letters to the Editor:** No special format necessary.

**News Items:** Please provide pertinent information such as the event, time, place, cost (if any), group or person in charge, who to contact, address, and deadline.

**Articles:** Manuscripts of original research are welcome. They should embrace sound principles of investigation and present data in a clear and concise manner. Consult the ARARA Style Guide at [arara.org/documents/arara\\_style\\_guide.pdf](http://arara.org/documents/arara_style_guide.pdf) for proper formats for body copy, citations, and References Cited. Articles are subject to editing for length. Include author(s) name, title or profession, affiliation, city, state, and return e-mail address. Since rock art is a visual medium, particular effort is spent to present solid quality photographs, figures, and illustrations in each issue. Your help is needed to achieve this goal. Line drawings should be submitted as 1200 dpi bitmap .tif files. Photographs (whether black-and-white or in color) should be submitted as 300 dpi or higher-quality .jpg files. The cumulative size of all files attached to a single email may not exceed 25 MB; if they do, the email will not be delivered. Please email [ajgwinters@yahoo.com](mailto:ajgwinters@yahoo.com) to receive alternative email delivery instructions for file transfer protocol instructions (ftp is easy).

**Current Events:** Current events and news of items of interest to our members that need public notice prior to the next issue of *La Pintura* should be submitted to Tania Ryan via email to [araraonline@googlegroups.com](mailto:araraonline@googlegroups.com) or [tryan.arara@gmail.com](mailto:tryan.arara@gmail.com) for inclusion in ARARA's monthly electronic newsletter, *ARARA Online*.

Opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the American Rock Art Research Association.

## ARARA Membership

For all Membership matters contact:

ARARA Membership  
Troy Scotter  
569 East 320 North  
Orem, UT 84097-4817

Common matters include new membership and renewals; corrections or changes in membership information; change delivery mode for *La Pintura* from regular mail to email (or vice versa); and replacement of undelivered issues of *La Pintura*.

Membership in the **American Rock Art Research Association** is open to all with an active interest in research, non-destructive use, and preservation of rock art, regardless of their nationality or country of residence.

Membership annual fees are:

Donor	\$120.00
Family	\$50.00
Individual	\$45.00
Society/Institution	\$60.00
Student*	\$35.00

\*Requires photocopy of current student ID.

\*\*Foreign members, please add \$10 (all countries).

Membership runs from January 1 through December 31 of each year. The Association is concerned primarily with American rock art, but membership is international in scope. Benefits include *La Pintura*, one copy of *American Indian Rock Art* for the membership year, reduced conference fees, and current news in the field of rock art. More importantly, membership means a shared concern for the ongoing conservation and preservation of one of the most significant elements of our heritage.

## American Rock Art Research Association

**Mission Statement:** ARARA is a diverse community of members with wide-ranging interests who are dedicated to rock art preservation, research, and education in order to communicate to a broad audience the significance of rock art as a non-renewable resource of enduring cultural value and an important expression of our shared cultural heritage.

**About ARARA:** ARARA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to encourage and to advance research in the field of rock art. Association members work for the protection and preservation of rock art sites through cooperative action with private landowners and appropriate state and federal agencies.

The Association strives to promote non-destructive utilization of rock art for scientific, educational, and artistic purposes. This is accomplished through a wide-ranging program to inform and educate the members as well as the general public regarding the rock art heritage of the United States as well as world-wide. These goals are communicated through the quarterly newsletter, *La Pintura*. Annual four-day conferences give both members and others interested in rock art the opportunity to share professional papers, presentations, and informal discussions.

**Code of Ethics:** ARARA subscribes to the following Code of Ethics and enjoins its members, as a condition of membership, to abide by the standards of conduct stated herein.

1. All local, state, and national antiquities laws will be strictly adhered to by the membership of ARARA. Rock art research shall be subject to appropriate regulations and property access requirements.
2. All rock art recording shall be non-destructive with regard to the rock art itself and the associated archaeological remains which may be present. No artifacts shall be collected unless the work is done as part of a legally constituted program of archaeological survey or excavation.
3. No excavation shall be conducted unless the work is done as part of a legally constituted excavation project. Removal of soil shall not be undertaken for the sole purpose of exposing subsurface rock art.
4. Potentially destructive recording and research procedures shall be undertaken only after careful consideration of any potential damage to the rock art sites.
5. Using the name of the American Rock Art Research Association, the initials of ARARA, and/or the logos adopted by the Association, and the identification of an individual as a member of ARARA are allowed only in conjunction with rock art projects undertaken in full accordance with accepted professional archaeological standards. The name ARARA may not be used for commercial purposes. While members may use their affiliation with ARARA for identification purposes, research projects may not be represented as having the sponsorship of ARARA without express approval of the Officers and Board.

The ARARA Code of Ethics, points 1 through 5, was adopted at the annual business meeting on May 24, 1984. The Code of Ethics was amended with the addition of the opening paragraph at the annual business meeting, May 28, 1988.

**Officers & Board:** Email: ARARABoard@gmail.com

President: Ann Brierty, imaglaguna@aol.com

Vice-President: Linda Olson, laolson@srt.com

Secretary: Karen Steelman, ksteelman@shumla.org

Treasurer: Troy Scotter, troyscotter@gmail.com

Board Members:

-Peter Anick, peter\_anick@yahoo.com

-David Kaiser, albion2000@netzero.net

-Belinda Mollard, bmollard@yahoo.com

-Alice Tretabas, atretabas@aol.com

### **Additional Contacts and Information**

#### **Annual Meeting, 2021, Great Falls, Montana (Virtual)**

-Conference Chairs, Mavis Greer, mavis@greerservices.com, and Donna Gillette, donna@gillette.com

-Local Committee, Jim Keyser, keyserfs@comcast.net

#### **ARARA Online e-Newsletter**

ARARA has a monthly newsletter that is distributed via e-mail. It is managed by Tania Ryan, araraonline@googlegroups.com. Its purpose is to provide information about any late-breaking conference updates, news affecting our rock art communities, and issues of interest that may need quick attention. It is open to the general public. To be added to the distribution list, send a request to ARARABoard@gmail.com and provide your e-mail address.

#### **ARARA on Facebook**

ARARA maintains a social media presence that is open to the public on Facebook. Join the 600+ individuals who "like" it. Content for consideration should be submitted to Scott Seibel, scottseibel@cox.net; alternatively, "like" the page, and "message" it to the moderator.

#### **ARARA's Official Website: [arara.wildapricot.org](http://arara.wildapricot.org)**

Considerable information about our organization is provided at our official website. Tabs of particular interest include Who We Are; Contacts and Officers; Constitution and ByLaws; Management, Protection, & Conservation; For Kids, Teens, & Teachers; Awards; Membership; Newsletter & Publications; and Upcoming Conference. Contact information is ararawebmaster@rockart.us.

#### **All Other Correspondence:**

The official mailing address for ARARA is: ARARA c/o Troy Scotter, 569 East 320 North, Orem, Utah, 84097-4817.

*La Pintura* is the Official Newsletter of the American Rock Art Research Association  
Address all editorial materials via e-mail to Linda Hylkema, Editor, at [araraeditor@rockart.us](mailto:araraeditor@rockart.us);  
Our mailing address is: ARARA, Attn: *La Pintura*, Linda Hylkema  
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# La Pintura

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